



Michele Segre's works at Daniel Weinberg Gallery includes sculptures of life-size cacti made from beeswax, papier-mâché, foam, metal and plaster. It is the New Yorker's second solo show in Los Angeles. (Charleen Alcid)

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AROUND THE GALLERIES By David Pagel, Special to The Times

A Pop trip away from the big city

Pop art has never paid much attention to nature. Preferring the slick surfaces of consumer goods to the unpackaged messiness of flora and fauna, Pop is big-city art with little room in its repertoire for plant and animal life.

Michele Segre is changing all that. At Daniel Weinberg Gallery, the New Yorker's second solo show in Los Angeles brings nature and culture into a lovely alliance that makes reality and fantasy appear to be two sides of the same coin.

Using beeswax, papier-mâché, foam, metal and plaster, Segre builds life-size cacti. Some sprout from diorama-style mountains. Their lumpy forms echo the shape of the human body and their precarious positions elicit sympathy. Others stand on the floor, their bottoms surrounded by lime green, hot orange and bright blue gravel, which recalls the rainbow-hued rocks found in aquariums.

Some of Segre's cacti are so realistic they could be used in botany classes. Others are more flagrant about their fakery. They seem to belong on movie sets or in the background of tableaux at Madame Tussauds. And others are flat out unbelievable, their sensual surfaces festooned with details too good to be true yet too wondrous to ignore.

Interspersed among the eight cacti are six skull-size lumps sculpted from the same materials. Two have a single, Cyclops-style eye. One sports a pair of nostrils. Another is covered with goofy protrusions. And one wears a real toupee.

Jasper Johns' enigmatic figures, Philip Guston's cartoon paintings and Charles Garabedian's everyday Surrealism lie behind Segre's whimsical works. Forming a Pop landscape that does not stop at the city limits, her playful pieces embrace the wide-open spaces of lively imaginations.

Daniel Weinberg Gallery, 6148 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 954-8425, through July 8. Closed Sundays and Mondays.